Walks in the North

During the Summer of 1818

by

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Chapter I.

Lancaster to Bowness, 31 Miles

Without preface, the one I have written is more tedious than useful, imagine me setting out from Lancaster, accompanied by a dear and lamented friend, each with a knapsack on his back, to enjoy the scenery of Cumberland and Westmoreland, in our way to the Highlands of Scotland.

The early death of that dear friend is not lamented by me alone, but by his countrymen in general; for he was John Keats the poet.

~~Yet, before entirely taking leave of my rejected preface, it would not be amiss, to extract one explanatory passage~~

"Weather permitting", unless of the bad and excessive kind, was not of much force in our agreement. But, on the morning of our departure, ready to start at four, a heavy rain detained us till seven. The interim was occupied with Milton, and I particularly preached patience out of Samson Agonistes. When the rain had subsided into a Scotch mist, we chose to consider it as appropriate and complimentary, and we, therefore, felt a pleasure in encountering it. Just out of the town, we overheard a labourer rather sarcastically observe to his companion - "There go a couple of gentlemen! - having nothing to do, they are finding out hard work for themselves!"

True: and those who must work may be comforted still further by reflecting that all men, who lead happy lives, labour in some way or another, including the bodily fatigue of field sports and the mental exhaustion of study. Our fellow labourer

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was in the right. We all work for the means of enjoying life; some one way, some another; some for money, some for the pleasure of excitement, some for health.

Four miles & brought us into Bolton to breakfast, when the rain came down heavily again. However, it is always a comfort to have actually begun a long intended journey; and we rejoiced to be out of that city, at the time of a general election, where "the aspiring blood of Lancaster" deprived us of all comfort. There we had to wait two hours for our promised dinner; and were ~~told~~ then told — "Not a bed in the house, gentlemen!"

Fortunately a private house received us — better than a public one, on such roaring occasions

At mid-day contrary to the prophecies of country-folks, the clouds cleared off, and we had as pleasant a walk as the muddy state of the road

We were not bound on a journey of discovery into "the busy haunts of men." Not that cities, their rise, progress, and increasing prosperity, or the reverse, or their prevailing interests and politics, were objects of indifference; but attention to them, and a love of the beauty and sublimity of nature are so widely distinct in character, as not to be harmonized together. Besides, large towns rarely lay in our route. On this account, my pains taking journal, written at the conclusion of each several stage, though full twenty years old, may serve as an itinerary for a traveller on a similar excursion, equally well as if I had just taken off my knapsack at the end of my northern walks. A score of years

would permit. Near the borders of Westmoreland, two miles from Bolton, there was a fine view, notwithstanding the mistiness of the horizon, and some impending clouds that the wind had not strength to drive forward over the hills. On our arrival, quite ready for dinner, we turned into the first inn, the Green Dragon, and put up our petition with the usual phrase of – "what we could have?" A voice replied in an instant, and in the gruffest tone, "Nothing! you can have nothing here!" It was the Green Dragon himself, in the shape of a tall, corpulent figure, with the largest face that ever man was blessed with – a face like a target; and none that a starving traveller might be tempted to shoot at. This unfeeling lump went on to tell us his house was full of soldiers, and that he could neither give us food or nor a room to sit in.

Turning from him into the King's Arms, the landlady there uttered her spleen in a milder strain. She said – "Ah! gentlemen, the soldiers are upon us! The Lowthers had brought 'em here to be in readiness. There'll be sad work at Appleby! There's Mr. Brougham, a great speaker in the house, I understand, comes down to oppose the Lowthers. Dear me! dear me! – at this election time to have soldiers upon us, when we ought to be making a bit of money. Not to be able to entertain any body! There was yesterday – I was forced to turn away two parties in their own carriages; for I have not a room to offer, nor a bed for any one. You can't sleep here, gentlemen; but I can give you a dinner. Dear, dear me! It goes to my heart – my spirits are quite down – to be forced to turn away two such parties! Oh! it's the Lowthers as I suspect – but that's only one's own mind – that

brought 'em in.

We truly sympathised with her grievance; for the turmoil of an election was a nuisance to the tranquilly disposed.

After dinner the rain returned. Though compelled to proceed, we gave up all idea of passing the night at Kendal. A little public house on the road-side was a welcome sight. We entered, and beheld a most uninviting hostess, smoking her pipe in a most formidable style. She informed us her house was quite full, and sent us onward, under the protection of our oilskin capes, to a place called End Moor. There the landlady, eyeing the burthens on our backs, inquired if we provided our own eating; on being answered in the negative, she promised accomodation for the night; though, as she said, she was in a "<u>squeer</u>," as all her house was whitewashing." In the room, which served for parlour and kitchen, sat an old soldier – that is, no longer in the service, for he was not above forty. He

was shrewd and good tempered - had served in America -
in the Peninsula - indeed in the Continental war
from the time of Sir John Moore to the battle of
Waterloo. He had received but one bullet in his thigh, and
a graze on his scull; and now, God bless him! he had
a pension of fifteen pence a day. For some time it
was difficult to change the conversation from the
Appleby election. From a corner in the room came
forth, still in a sort of puzzled doze, an old toper, one
Richard Rathbone, drunk as a sponge. He staggered
forward in an attitude something like a bear, half
raising himself on his hind legs, and dangling his
fore paws before him. Suddenly he thrust his face
forward, made a grasp at my knapsack, and asked if
we sold spectacles and razors. Being quietly
discouraged he imagined me offended, protesting that
nothing was further from his thoughts, and made his
apology by assuring me he was always "foolish in his
drink" he then whispered in my ear "I never offend any

man – not I! – so if you'll give me something to drink – why – I'll take it!" As this appeal was unavailing, he left the house in a maudlin fit of melancholy, hiccoughing out – "Ah, nobody trusts me with liquor! Well, I have seen all I ever loved in the grave, and I shall soon go there myself – and there'll be an end!"

While at tea, the attention of our hostess was attracted to our not using sugar, and called the unwilling notice of her loutish son to so economical a fact. Nay, on the following morning, she, the worthy Mrs Black, almost made it a matter of conscience, on that score, to deduct a something from the reckoning.

During the evening I learnt more of poor Richard Radshaw. He had been once well to do, as a small farmer, with carts and horses, and all he wanted. His wife died; and then, in a short

time, he lost both his sons, one in a fever, the other by an accident. No one was near him; for his two daughters were married to tradesmen in Lancaster. He endeavoured to drown his grief in liquor, became reckless, and neglected his farm till he was ruined. Now he was a day labourer, or he made bed-mats, spending his money in drink as fast as he earned it.

Sorrow and solitariness may offer some excuse for the desperate remedy of intoxication; scarcely for its becoming an inveterate habit. Yet could not his daughters, by timely tokens of their affection and by their society, have saved him?

Without elevating him to the rank of a Lear in humble life, or degrading his daughters into a Regan and a Goneril, he may be commiserated and perhaps, they may be blamed.

One daughter, with a husband whose lordly will was not to be questioned, could not afford filial assistance, while he bluntly declared it was

enough for him to support his own wife and family. The other daughter, indeed, ruled her husband; but she gave her father nothing, fearful it might add to his unhappy infirmity, often recurring, with many sighs and a few tears to his "distressing state" expatiating on her "hopelessness of his reformation," and protesting it was a subject which "cuts her heart in twain to dwell upon." And thus she had been known to drawlingly speak while taking her share of a pot of ale; but then, as she averred, her constitution was weak, and stood in need of a little help.

Richard Radshaw's case affords scope for a comparison between the evils of selfishness and drunkenness. Not having made up my mind as to which vice is worse than the other, for the present I leave gentlemen over their extra bottle to exclaim against selfishness, and the man who buttons up all the world in his own waistcoat to show no mercy

towards the disgusting vice of drunkenness.

On the next morning, after reaching Kendall, we had our first really joyous walk of nine miles towards the lake of Windermere. The country was ~~not~~ wild and romantic, the weather fine, though not sunny, while the fresh mountain air, and many ~~lakes about us~~ larks about us, gave us unbounded delight. As we approached the lake, the scenery became more and more grand and beautiful; and from time to time we stayed our steps, gazing intently on it. Hitherto, Keats had witnessed nothing superior to Devonshire; but, beautiful as that is, he was now tempted to speak of it with indifference. At the first turn ~~in~~ from the road, before descending to the hamlet of Hownes, we both simultaneously came to a full stop. The lake lay before us. His bright eyes darted on a mountain-peak, beneath which was gently

floating on a silver cloud; thence to a very small island, adorned with the foliage of trees, that lay beneath us, and surrounded by water of a glorious hue, when he exclaimed "How can I believe in that? – surely it cannot be!" He warmly asserted that no view in the world could equal this – that it must beat all Italy – yet, having moved onward but a hundred yards – catching the further extremity of the lake, he thought it "more and more wonderfully beautiful!" The trees far and near, the grass immediately around us, the fern and the furze in their most luxuriant growth, all added to the charm. Not a mist, but an imperceptible vapour bestowed a mellow, softened hint over the immense mountains on the opposite side and at the further end of the lake. To look on them, with their awful accompaniments, though with the eyes of the

most stupid, must bring conviction that there is a God! — however he might half persuade himself to the contrary in a city. It is needless to argue that a single blade of grass — which, by the by, is difficult to be found within a city — its formation, its life, its growth — indicates and even displays the same incomprehensible power — that there can be no degrees in incomprehensibility — and much more that can be easily said. But these mountains stood before us,

"To elevate the more — than reasoning mind"

and the spirit was bowed in ~~reference~~ reverence